

Developing skills in providing outreach programs: Construction and use of the POSE (Performance of Outreach Skills Evaluation) rubric.

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Abstract:

Rubrics, commonly used in classroom assessment, can be beneficial in assessing the performance of counseling outreach and presentation skills. A rubric to assess how well graduate students in counseling learned and demonstrated outreach presentation skills was developed. The development of the rubric is described, along with results of the evaluation of the rubric. Suggestions for a variety of uses of rubrics in the college counseling center context, as well as in counselor education, are presented.

Keywords: education | counselor education | teaching | pedagogy | counseling outreach | student evaluation | counseling students | outreach presentation skills

Article:

Outreach, defined as “any organized program, workshop, media effort, class, or systematic attempt to provide psychological education” (Stone & Archer, 1990, p. 557), has been acknowledged as a primary function of college counseling centers (Morrill, Oetting, & Hurst, 1974). Recently, college and university counseling centers have been confronted with increasing demands for services, often without the necessary increase in resources to meet those demands (Gallagher, 2006). Outreach programming is one way to extend the counseling center’s reach and resources on campus, providing the opportunity to focus on education and prevention, reach less accessible populations of students, and serve groups of students rather than individuals (Archer & Cooper, 1998; Marks & McLaughlin, 2005).

With the growing demands for direct services and with the increased number of students with severe concerns (Benton, Robertson, Tseng, Newton, & Benton, 2003; Bishop, 2006; Gallagher, 2006), college counseling centers may have few staff resources to devote to outreach (Hodges,

2001). Archer and Cooper (1998) recommended that college counseling centers could expand services, including outreach, by enlisting the help of various members of the campus community (e.g., students, faculty, and staff).

With the expansion of the provision of outreach services by various individuals within and outside the college counseling center, adequate training is essential. Training for outreach providers needs to include both content-focused training and skill-focused presentation training. Although the assessment of the success of content-focused training can be relatively simple and straightforward, the assessment of success in skills-focused training is comparatively more challenging because it is more subjective (Kane, 1992). Performance-based assessment reflects the reality that individuals will have varying degrees of success. In such cases, the use of a rubric can aid in evaluation (Brualdi, 2002). A rubric is “a scoring tool that lays out the specific expectations for an assignment” (Stevens & Levi, 2005, p. 3).

Most commonly used in classroom assessment (cf. Brualdi, 2002; Dunbar, Brooks, & Kubicka-Miller, 2006; Goldsby & Fazal, 2001; Popham, 1997; Stevens & Levi, 2005; Suskie, 2004), rubrics also have been used in counselor education to evaluate the clinical performance of counseling interns (Smith & Hanna, 1998) and the knowledge and skills of undergraduates in counselor education (Stenzel, 2005). Using a rubric for assessing skills can be helpful in a number of ways. A rubric makes explicit for both evaluators and those being evaluated the areas in which evaluation is to occur and what the expected level of performance in each area is. A rubric also promotes a level of consistency across evaluations—from evaluator to evaluator, from evaluatee to evaluatee, and from one time to another—by establishing what components are to be evaluated and what standards are to be used. According to Goldsby and Fazal (2001), rubrics also “increase consistency in the rating of performances, products, and achievements by enabling teachers to focus on what elements of a performance or product are most important and not be distracted by subjective concerns” (p. 609).

In this manuscript, we will present the development of the POSE (Performance of Outreach Skills Evaluation) rubric as an illustration of rubric development and evaluation in the arena of counseling outreach. We will do so following the framework of Suskie’s (2004) five steps in rubric construction. Following a brief description of the context, the steps will be described and illustrated. Implications for counseling outreach and for other areas of counselor education are then discussed.

Outreach Project Overview

As part of the ALIVE (Awareness Linking Individuals to Valuable Education) @ Purdue Campus Suicide Prevention Project, graduate students in counseling were trained to deliver outreach training programs to resident assistants (RAs) and additional outreach programs to students living in residence halls. The goal of the outreach efforts was to increase referral behavior by RAs and help-seeking behavior by students who were feeling emotionally

overwhelmed. The graduate students (called “Educators” in this project) underwent an intensive week-long training (approximately 30 hours) focused on understanding the constituent populations, content knowledge on referral and suicide, and delivery of the outreach programs. We used a variety of resources for the content knowledge, and we found the description of the development of delivery and facilitation skills by Brooks-Harris and Stock-Ward (1999) helpful in training Educators about the nuances of program presentation. The first 3 days of the training were primarily didactic in nature, and the last 2 days of the week were spent in experiential training in which Educators practiced their outreach skills and were provided with feedback from their peers and from professional clinicians/counselors and faculty members (ALIVE @ Purdue professional staff). (Further information regarding the curriculum for this training can be obtained from the authors.) A refresher training session was held 3 months later when Educators again practiced their outreach skills and were provided feedback from their peers and the ALIVE@Purdue professional staff. The impetus for the creation of the POSE rubric was the need to assess Educators’ outreach provision skills of the ALIVE @ Purdue Educators and to provide them with formative feedback for reaching a mastery level of outreach provision skills.

Steps in Rubric Construction

The first step in creating a rubric is to look for models (Suskie, 2004). Examples of rubrics are plentiful on the web and can be located with simple searches. These examples may provide one with a model that can be adapted to one’s needs and circumstances. Suskie emphasizes that even rubrics developed for high school students (rubrics are used frequently in K-12 education) can provide a useful starting point for rubric development in higher education. In our search for models, we found no examples of rubrics for outreach provision skills *per se*. Therefore, we broadened our search to a related area, the assessment of communication skills.

Assessing the communication skills of students has been considered extensively in the communications literature (cf. Backlund, Brown, Gurry, & Jandt, 1982; Dunbar et al., 2006; McCroskey, 1982; Rubin, 1982). Backlund and his colleagues (1982) reviewed existing instruments designed to measure speaking and listening skills in order to recommend adopting one at the state level to be used to assess communication skills of secondary school students. They found no instrument they could recommend that covered all of their criteria, and they compiled a list of recommendations for the development of instruments. Rubin (1982) described the development of the Communication Competency Assessment Instrument (CCAI) to assess basic communication skills necessary for success in college. Morreale, Moore, Taylor, Surges-Tatum, and Hulbert-Johnson (1993) developed The Competent Speaker Speech Evaluation Form, a rubric for assessing college students’ basic speaking competencies, which were agreed on by the National Communications Association (NCA). The eight competencies identified by NCA and assessed by The Competent Speaker include choosing and narrowing a topic, communicating the purpose, providing supporting material, using an organizational pattern, using appropriate language, using vocal variety, pronunciation, grammar, and articulation, and using physical behavior to support the verbal message (Moreale et al., 1993). These

competencies and The Competent Speaker rubric are used frequently in the assessment of college students' speaking skills (Morreale, Preston, & Hickerson, 2010).

Although rubrics to assess communication skills exist (e.g., The Competent Speaker), we determined they were not adequate to assess the skills necessary for presenting campus outreach programs. Although communication skills are an important part of outreach provisions, they represent only a portion of the skills required. For example, individuals engaged in outreach need to be skilled in the process of responding to audience questions and to answering those questions in an appropriate and informative manner. This process of responding to questions goes beyond basic communication/presentation skills. In addition, because the Educators were trained to deliver a planned curriculum, items found in communications skills rubrics addressing areas such as choice of topic, providing supporting material, communicating the purpose, and using an organizational pattern (Morreale et al., 1993) were irrelevant to this assessment.

The second step in rubric development is to "list the things you are looking for" (Suskie, 2004, p. 134). This is a list of what you want those being assessed to demonstrate, which other authors refer to as the evaluative criteria (Brualdi, 2002; Popham, 1997). If possible, the identification of evaluative criteria is best done by more than one expert (Brualdi, 2002). The ALIVE @ Purdue professional staff (i.e., two counseling center psychologists and three academicians with expertise in college student development, counseling psychology, and counselor education) identified the primary purpose for the rubric—to assess the outreach presentation skills of the ALIVE @ Purdue Educators. After a review of the literature and extended discussion with the entire professional staff to gather expert judgment and instruction objectives, the three faculty members identified behaviors that would operationalize the various outreach presentation skills. Where the public speaking literature (i.e., the models) did not address the relevant areas, we drew our list of behaviors from the literature on group counseling and consultation, particularly in the area of cofacilitation (e.g., Corey & Corey, 2006; Jacobs, Masson, & Harvill, 2002). These identified behaviors served as a basis for an initial item pool, which was presented to the entire professional staff for review and feedback.

Still in Step 2, Suskie (2004) advised rubric developers to review the list of items generated and to edit the list to the most relevant and essential items. She cautions that long rubrics can be time-consuming to score and confusing for students because the most important skills can be obscured. However, she notes that longer rubrics may be more appropriate for holistic experiences, such as field experiences "in which students are expected to demonstrate a broad range of learning goals" (p. 134). In this case, the list of items was pared to 14, a longer list than is typically ideal according to Suskie, but a number that seemed appropriate, given the broad range of skills we expected from these advanced students.

We then grouped the 14 skills into three categories: delivery, cofacilitation skills, and presentation quality. We gave each skill a clear label. Items in the delivery category are most like those found in existing communications rubrics (cf. Morreale et al., 1993); delivery includes four

constructs related to eye contact and speech (i.e., volume, pitch, and clarity). The other two areas, cofacilitation skills and presentation quality, are not typically addressed in communications rubrics, because they are related to the delivery of an outreach curriculum with a cofacilitator. Cofacilitation skills include five constructs related to how presenting pairs relate to each other during the program (i.e., prior planning, power, leading and following, nonverbal communication, and patience). Presentation quality assesses the overall presentation based on five constructs (i.e., ability to engage the audience, mastery of material, management of time, management of materials, and ability to respond to the audience).

Suskie's (2004) third step is to leave room for the unexpected. We attempted to do so in two ways. First, we created a column in the rubric for comments on each of the skills in addition to a rating. Second, we created two open ended items at the end of the rubric: "areas of particular strength" and "areas that need work." For "areas of particular strength," we were able to capture the "ineffables" (Suskie, 2004, p. 135)—the creativity, originality, or "something extra" (p. 135) that were not captured by the rubric items. We were able, with the "areas that need work" item, to focus the student on the areas most in need of improvement.

In the fourth step, the rubric developer creates the rating scale (Suskie, 2004), also known as performance criteria (Brualdi, 2002; Popham, 1997). In this step, the performance levels that comprise the rating scale are developed. Suskie (2004) recommended using at least three performance levels and usually using no more than five. The use of more than five levels creates difficulty for the evaluator in making fine distinctions between levels of performance (Suskie, 2004). The evaluation in rubrics may be normreferenced, where students are compared to one another, or criterion-referenced, where each student is compared to a set of standards (Dunbar et al., 2006). Because the goal was to assist each Educator reach an acceptable level of performance prior to presenting the outreach to the intended audience, we chose a criterion-based approach to evaluation (Dunbar et al., 2006). For the POSE rubric, we used a five-level evaluation scale ranging from 1¼ needs improvement to 5¼ exemplary. Suskie noted that an "exemplary category is needed to motivate students to do better than merely adequate work" (p. 135). We then created descriptions for each skill at each performance level. Following the recommendations in the literature (Brualdi, 2002; Popham, 1997), each was described in terms of observable behaviors. A helpful tip in creating performance level descriptions (Stevens & Levi, 2005) is to start with description of exemplary performance and then move to the lowest performance level. These "are often simply the negation of the exemplary task description, in which case we can actually cut and paste accordingly" (Stevens & Levi, 2005, p. 41). Once the two extreme ends are defined, the rubric writer can fill in the middle category or categories accordingly. This is, in fact, how we developed our performance level descriptions. (See Appendix A for a copy of the POSE rubric and Appendix B for the evaluative criteria/rating scale).

The final step in rubric development is to test the rubric (Suskie, 2004). We tested the POSE rubric and assessment during the initial phase of the ALIVE @ Purdue Educator training. During this field test, we rated each Educator at two stages. The first stage occurred at the end of the

week of intensive training, to provide feedback on the Educators' initial practice presentation of the outreach program. We gave specific verbal feedback based on their performance as recorded on the rubric. Although the Educators were not given copies of the assessment form, each item was covered in detail by the professional staff member (one of the paper authors) observing and rating them. The professional staff members used the rubric form to review each element of the presentation with the Educators in training. Three months later, just prior to their delivery of the first program, we evaluated Educators again using the same protocol in order to ensure readiness to present the outreach program to every RA on campus (approximately 300). Again, evaluations were reviewed with the Educators. The results of the field testing are described below.

Field Testing

Participants

Sixteen graduate students were trained as ALIVE @ Purdue Educators. All but one was a counseling psychology doctoral student; one was a master's student in school counseling. Students in both programs were invited through a recruitment e-mail to serve as Educators. Criteria for involvement included the following: (a) completion of first year of graduate study including courses in counseling theories and techniques, group counseling, multicultural counseling, and career theory and assessment; (b) availability to attend all required training sessions; and (c) availability to train RAs. The group consisted of 11 females and 5 males, and 11 White, 4 international, and 1 African American student. Five ALIVE @ Purdue professional staff (the authors of this paper) utilized the outreach evaluation rubric and assessed Educators' outreach skills. With regard to demographics, the professional staff was composed of two counseling center psychologists (one White male and one Latina) and three faculty members (counseling psychology, school counseling, and college student personnel; all White females). The three faculty members on the professional staff worked collaboratively in the development of the rubric, and all professional staff members were trained on using the system prior to the evaluation of the Educators.

Procedure

The ALIVE @ Purdue professional staff used the POSE rubric to assess Educators' outreach skills during the spring training period and again during the summer refresher session. General practice was for one staff member to evaluate each Educator's skills. However, two professional staff members did assess the skills of the same four Educators in May to allow for interrater reliability assessment. Item-level correlations cannot be reported for 5 of the items because of a lack of variance for one rater on the item. The reliability of the other items ranged from .52 to 1.0, except for Item 7 (correlation was .52). In all cases except for two, the same professional staff member assessed the same Educators' outreach skills during May and again during August. In the August training, all Educators demonstrated acceptable levels of outreach skills; therefore, none was prevented from delivering the outreach program.

Outcomes

Outcomes indicate that the POSE rubric has satisfactory internal consistency with an initial (in May) Cronbach's alpha of .86 and a followup (in August) Cronbach's alpha of .79. In addition, the rubric appears to be sensitive to change, as there was a significant increase in Educators' presentation skills from the initial to follow up training, paired sample $t(15) = 4.603$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.55$, (Initial $M = 43.81$, $SD = 7.53$; Follow-up $M = 53.63$, $SD = 4.87$). Four Educators were evaluated on their outreach skills by two members of the professional staff during the initial training. The ratings of these staff members were significantly correlated with one another ($r = .96$, $p < .05$, $r^2 = .92$), indicating interrater reliability of the form and rubric.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

One limitation of the present field testing is the fact that not all five professional staff members were involved in the interrater reliability process. It is possible that there were disparities in how some staff members perceived and used the tool. In addition, a direction for future testing is the assessment of the interrater reliability of ratings at both initial and follow-up phases of training to ensure that the high interrater reliability seen in the initial phase of training continued. At that time, Item 7 ("Leading & Following") should be assessed. It is possible that the problem with this item is that it is assessing two different behaviors—leading and following, which might account for the problems associated with the item. Perhaps, that item should be turned into two items—one to assess leading and the other to assess following.

A second limitation is that the focus was on the development of the rubric, and no data were gathered to attest to or establish its validity. Future research could be done to determine whether individuals who were scored higher on the POSE rubric received higher evaluations from those to whom they provided outreach, providing evidence of criterion-related validity. Researchers also could use the POSE rubric and other related rubrics (e.g., The Competent Speaker) to assess individuals in order to provide evidence of convergent validity. Such a step is not typically taken in rubric development to be used solely for instructional purposes but would be important to use it in more formal assessment or research. A possible direction for the future research is a content validity study in which experts in the area of outreach provision would provide their perspectives on the appropriateness of the individual POSE items.

A third limitation was that Educators who composed the sample used in the present field testing did not receive a copy of the evaluation form and rubric during the training process. Such an approach would have allowed them the opportunity to focus concretely on areas in need of development. Future research could evaluate potential differences in the effectiveness of allowing students access to the rubric at different times during the training process (e.g., before any practice takes place, before the first evaluation takes place, between the first and second evaluation) to see whether there is an optimal time to allow for focus on honing presentation skills while also allowing the initial focus on learning the content of the presentation itself.

Discussion

The strength of the POSE as an evaluation of outreach performance is indicated by the internal consistency data, the strong interrater reliability, and the ability of the POSE to detect growth in the Educators' outreach presentation skills. Below we outline implications for practice, as well as next steps in the present outreach training project.

Implications for Practice

As the roles of counseling center staff change and adapt to meet the needs of incoming college students, outreach programming has become part of the professional duties of counseling center personnel (Arehart-Treichel, 2002). Incorporating outreach programming is one way to provide primary and secondary prevention to a larger population than could be served through direct counseling services only. However, with increasing numbers of students requiring direct services (Bishop, 2006), counseling center staff have limited time for providing outreach. Consequently, the use of undergraduate peers, graduate students, faculty, and other professional staff may be relied upon as advocated by Archer and Cooper (1998) in order to provide this outreach.

In addition to provision of outreach for the purposes of providing preventative services, many college counseling centers are involved in training the next generation of counseling professionals through the provision of practicum and internship experiences. Part of these field experiences focuses upon the delivery of outreach programming to the college campus community. Given the importance of competency-based training relating to the delegation of work to others as indicated in the 2002 American Psychological Association's Ethics Code (APA, 2002), it is the responsibility of trainers and supervisors to "authorize only those responsibilities that such persons can be expected to perform competently on the basis of their education, training, or experience, either independently or with the level of supervision being provided" (p. 1064). In addition, the 2005 American Counseling Association Code of Ethics explicitly indicates that "[c]ounselors practice only within the boundaries of their competence, based on their education, training, supervised experience, state and national professional credentials, and appropriate professional experience" (p. 9). Therefore, it is imperative that counseling center professional staff ensure that both counselors-in-training and paraprofessionals are competent and capable of providing outreach services to our campuses.

Often, practicum students, interns, and noncounseling-oriented staff arrive at a counseling center with limited outreach experience and require training. Because outreach can be a very interactive experience for both the students in the target audience and the presenter, skill development is essential to advance a positive experience for the audience and to stimulate positive word of mouth marketing about programs presented by the counseling center. Training of practicum students and interns frequently involves didactic instruction and cofacilitation, at least initially, as the student learns to become more comfortable presenting program material.

As such, the POSE rubric is a training tool to develop and assess outreach skills including program delivery, engagement, facilitation, and presentation skills, regardless of the professional or educational background of the individual being evaluated. Based on its sensitivity to Educator skill development between initial and final evaluation and its interrater reliability, the POSE rubric is an ideal assessment to evaluate these outreach skills as they are developing. Because it was designed with these skills sets in mind, rather than the content of the outreach program being delivered, the POSE rubric can be easily adapted for a variety of outreach programs and formats on college campuses. Given this flexibility, it is a useful tool that can be used by the personnel in college counseling centers while training auxiliary personnel to be competent providers of outreach.

More than that, perhaps, it provides evaluators with a method to quantify the interpersonal nature of program provision and the nuances of audience interaction. The rubric lends itself to structured training experiences, because it helps trainers track their own thoughts about how effective their trainees are with the material. Not only can it be used by trainers to track their own thoughts, but trainees provided with the POSE rubric can also use it to reflect upon and identify skills that may need more attention prior to being evaluated by the trainer.

The POSE rubric may be particularly beneficial to doctoral-level interns and postdoctoral residents working in campus counseling centers, who are developing their supervision skills. Practicum, internship, and postdoctoral residency experiences are generally year-long training opportunities, and interns and postdoctoral residents often have opportunities to provide supervision during their training or professional experience. As interns and residents develop competencies in the area of outreach programming under the guidance of their outreach coordinator or supervisor, they can then begin to develop their skills in training practicum students to conduct outreach activities. The POSE rubric provides clear structure that would allow more formal assessment of competencies in the area of outreach delivery.

Other counselors-in-training could also benefit from the use of a rubric such as the POSE. Whether the activity is called outreach, classroom guidance or psychoeducational presentations, the skills (i.e., delivery, cofacilitation, and presentation quality) measured by the POSE are important for successful intervention. Training programs in each of these fields, as well as related fields such as college counseling and social work, could use the POSE to help students develop skills in providing outreach type activities. Although accredited counseling programs are required to offer coursework on one-on-one communication and counseling skills and group counseling (Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs, 2009), only one accreditation standard even refers to provision of outreach, and it is a reference knowing “principles of . . . outreach” (SACC C.3). Therefore, it is anticipated that although these skills are important for professional counselors (see Archer & Cooper, 1998; Marks & McLaughlin, 2005), counseling programs may not provide much instruction or practice with presentation skills such as those called for by outreach programs. Faculty in counselor education programs could benefit from a rubric like the POSE that already has been developed. For

instance, it could be used by school counseling faculty observing school counseling interns while they provide classroom guidance lessons. In addition to counselors-in-training, outreach presentation training might be beneficial for other paraprofessional and professional staff. For example, advisors or faculty who may have clearly delineated educational or counseling roles may have less experience presenting some types of material in a psychoeducational manner. Therefore, having a rubric that could be used to hone and update presentational skills may be useful for not only counselors-in-training and paraprofessional staff but also for professional staff, faculty, and advisors who have less experience with psychoeducational presentations on specific topics or with a particular target audience.

Conclusion

We reported here on the initial development and use of the POSE as an illustration of Suskie's (2004) five steps of rubric development. There is clearly more research needed to further determine the psychometric qualities of the POSE rubric and form. Further research could address questions such as: How do POSE ratings by supervisors/faculty relate to audience assessments both of satisfaction and of perceived value of the presentation? How well does the POSE function with other populations?

As the resources of college counseling centers are being taxed by increasing demands for direct services for increasing numbers of students with severe problems (Benton et al., 2003; Bishop, 2006; Gallagher, 2006), their ability to engage in another of the traditional primary functions of counseling centers—outreach—may be compromised. The use of the POSE rubric to assess skills in outreach provision can aid in the training and evaluation of auxiliary personnel, such as graduate students, peer counselors, faculty, and student affairs professionals, to provide psychoeducational programming to groups of students and extend the reach of college counseling centers. Beyond the counseling center setting, the POSE rubric can serve as a useful teaching tool in counselor education programs to help counselors-in-training develop presentation and guidance skills and to provide faculty with a way to evaluate their skills and provide formative feedback. Finally, the POSE can serve as a model for the development of other rubrics in counselor education, following Suskie's (2004) five steps in rubric construction.

Appendices have been omitted from this formatted document.

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